

**Abstract 641**

**TITLE:** Youth as Action Researchers for HIV Prevention: Translating  
Youth Research to Prevention Practice with Peers

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**ISSUE:** AIDS risk is increasing dramatically among urban African American and Latino youth. Youth have superficial understanding of HIV/AIDS risk and preventive factors and structural factors impede good risk prevention decisions. Better understanding of youth experience and new approaches are needed to deepen youth understanding of contextual/ecological, social network and individual factors contributing to HIV/AIDS risk exposure in their communities and to empower them to influence their peers to improve sexual decision-making.

**SETTING:** The National Teen Action Research Institute's AIDS prevention research program is offered to urban African American, Latino and other multiethnic high school students in Hartford, Connecticut, surrounding communities and statewide. Audience is all youth, especially urban youth in high-risk areas.

**PROJECT:** To address these issues, the National Teen Action Research of the Institute for Community Research, University of Connecticut Medical School and Yale Center for Interdisciplinary Research on AIDS trains urban youth ages 15-19 to conduct youth driven team research, dissemination and community action addressing HIV/AIDS, drug use and reproductive health risks. 30 youth researchers each year undergo: a) 6 weeks of full time HIV prevention social science research training on a topic of their choice funded through an NIMH training program grant; b) involvement in all aspects of a group applied scientific study; c) dissemination of the research results and materials to peers in schools, state departments, university programs and youth groups during the school year; d) training other youth in Connecticut to conduct their own AIDS research and peer intervention/dissemination projects.

**RESULTS:** 75 young people trained in the past 3 years; less than 30% attrition rate among youth researchers over a three year period; five HIV/AIDS related studies on factors contributing to sex at an early age and unprotected sex; 40 youth research trainers have conducted HIV/AIDS action research training with over 50 youth groups and prevention policy making coalitions in the state, to transfer research skills, research results, and AIDS prevention information and technology; specific products of youth research include a prevention calendar, written reports, prevention posters, PowerPoint presentations, a multimedia exhibit and instructional materials. Of participants who enter college, almost 100% remain. A training manual has been produced for national dissemination.

**LESSONS LEARNED:** Social science research is an important means of empowering urban youth individually and in groups to become AIDS prevention advocates with policy makers; youth driven research deepens understanding of HIV risk and strengthens capacity to act as effective peer educators; involving urban youth in research at the high school level promotes college entry and HIV research and/or prevention careers in underachievers.

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